

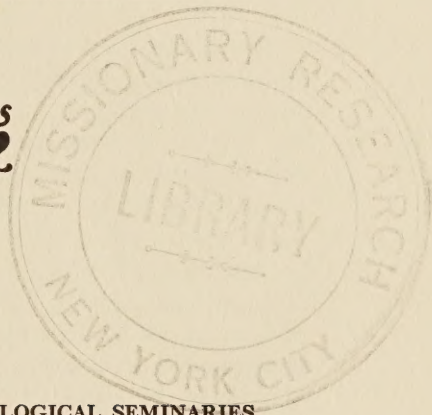
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**THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**  
**AND THE**  
**WORLD MISSION OF CHRISTIANITY**

**THE BACKGROUND OF THE MODERN  
PROCLAMATION OF CHRISTIANITY**

**W. DOUGLAS MACKENZIE**

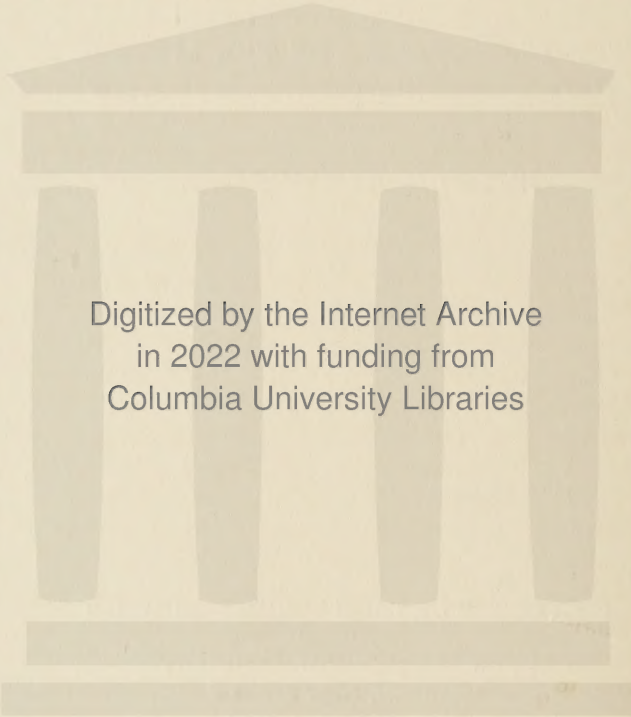


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# THE BACKGROUND OF THE MODERN PROCLAMATION OF CHRISTIANITY

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## I

IT HAS become clear today that the chief enemy of Christianity is to be found neither in any other positive religion, nor in any one system of philosophy, nor even in any criticism of the documents which describe the origins of our faith.

The non-Christian religions are manifestly crumbling before the advance of modern science and the spread of Christianity itself. The various systems of philosophy, except crass materialism or narrow and dogmatic naturalism, have all been found quite congenial to the Christian faith by one or other of the many sincere and powerful forms of theological statement. For more than a hundred years many learned critical investigators have tried to find some picture of the rise of Christianity which should be historically true and yet undermine the fundamental characteristics of Christianity. It is no exaggeration to say that they have utterly failed in this prolonged and laborious endeavor.

The course of actual history has proved for two thousand years that mere philosophy and mere criticism cannot destroy the majestic affirmations of the Christian religion. If that had been possible, it is difficult to see how Christianity could have conquered the

Graeco-Roman world or survived the movements of thought in later ages.

The final foe and the supreme test of the Christian faith will appear only when an actual system of life has been established which provides for a superior form of human experience than that which Christianity can secure for mankind. And that is what is being attempted today. I am not referring to the mere secularism of the multitude. That has always been present. In a sense it is a peculiar by-product of Christianity, which destroys all other faiths and leaves the general mass of men to choose between surrender to Christ and a wholly material, gross, and dull form of life. For that the real cure is straight evangelism. But the thing which is before us now, and with which we must reckon is a determined effort to provide a really worthy alternative to the Christian way of living, without reference to a Divine Being or a future life.

Historically this has been arrived at and in a measure achieved by many individuals of refinement and of lofty ideals, in past generations. Men like Spinoza, perhaps Goethe, and in later times men like Darwin and Spencer are good examples of persons who disowned any positive religion and found personal satisfaction in their own attitudes towards the final mysteries of human existence. The new fact which emerges today is that this attitude is being deliberately and very widely promulgated; and that it is attracting the adhesion of large numbers of men and women. It is passing beyond the limits of the learned and the intellectual and becoming the attitude and basis of life for the multitudes who read magazines and stories in



which it is all set forth as an adequate mode of human living. Whether it is called the "Religion of the Spirit," or "Humanism," or "Secularism" matters not. This is passing from the scholar's study to the street. It animates men who live between the office and the golf course, the home and the theatre. Their life seems to them full and rich, agreeable and honorable without a thought of God or immortality, of Christ or sin, of worship or communion with anything higher than humanity and its nobler achievements.

This is the most powerful foe which Christianity has ever encountered.

## II

When we consider how the Christian religion can maintain itself against this truly portentous antagonist, we may begin by ruling out certain methods which are being employed.

In the first place the Christian faith cannot be maintained by mere obscurantism. The effort of those extremists who adopt the great word Fundamentalist to cover their antagonism to all modern advances in natural science and historical research, must be not only futile but positively harmful. Facts are facts. They are, as the Scotch say, "chiels that winna ding." The truths which modern science has discovered as to the physical universe must be accepted, even though they are being constantly restated and have not yet received any final exposition. The truths which historical research has discovered, even though they are never set in a final form, must yet be provisionally accepted, even though they invade many of the traditional elements in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testa-

ments. Mere denial of these things is no true defence of Christianity.

In the next place, we can have no confidence in the thin and futile apologetics of those who begin by reducing Christianity to a minimum. It is interesting to see how some of our more scholarly humanists despise the effort to bolster up Christianity by transforming it into a system of history and of thought which is scarce distinguishable from their own treatment of all the great religions of the world. When this method finds itself upon so-called "Valuations of Jesus" which presuppose that He was in no sense the person who is set forth in the writings of the New Testament as the object of a supreme religious faith, its utter failure is apparent and undeniable. The Christianity which our more reverent humanists have surrendered, often with a pathetic regret, is not that kind of thing at all. They know that this anæmic faith could never have conquered the world, created a civilization or merited the serious antagonism of great minds in ancient or modern times. An apologetic which these men can only treat with quiet scorn is already defeated, however learned and pious its proponents may be. One of the best of the avowed humanists speaks of this as "substituting trivial illusions for majestic faiths."

### III

The first thing to realize afresh in the present situation is that, over against all other faiths, the Christian faith must prove itself by the original, essential, and irreplaceable methods of being lived and of being proclaimed as it is lived. Christianity has from the beginning claimed to be a creative work of God. It has

not ever been successfully described as an achievement of man in his search for what is called "satisfaction." Its fate in the world depends wholly upon whether it proves itself to be a continuous manifestation of the Divine Will in the lives of men and women.

No attempt at a victorious apologetic, whether it call itself philosophical, historical, or scientific, can possibly succeed if it is not related to the actual on-go of Christianity, its actual grasp upon the lives of human beings, for two thousand years, and now at last in every country in the world. To put it bluntly, if we professors of theology, and our theological students, and the ministers and missionaries and the members of Christian Churches everywhere do not really possess the divine life, the indwelling of God at the center of our personal lives, through faith in Jesus Christ, then undoubtedly *cadit quaestio*. The wise enemy has nothing to destroy and we absurd people have nothing to defend. But if the amazing vitality of Christianity is unexhausted, if increasing, unnumbered multitudes of men and women are conscious of a divine redeeming power, then our task as constructive theologians is not apologetics but proclamation and explanation woven into one. Our work as theological educators is not to reduce the gospel to an easy kind of minimum which creates no converts, meets none of the deepest cravings of the human spirit, has no light on destiny, no direct word as to our actual relations with the living God, no right to demand the great surrender of trust or to command the great adventure of love. Our work is to deal with that Christianity which still is creating more saints than ever, which is receiving the humble, glad confidence of powerful minds, of emancipated leaders



of righteousness. For there are in the world today more educated, enlightened men and women who have given their all to the service of God and man in the name of Christ than in any past generation. And alike our defence, our proclamation and our systematic exposition of Christianity will have no relevance to the facts which does not begin there, and, after dealing with all its appropriate problems in philosophy, history, and science, return to that perpetual, universal movement of human experience as the act of God in Christ.

This is one of the greatest lessons which can be learned from the three great conferences at Stockholm, Lausanne, and Jerusalem. No one can consider the personal make-up of those conferences and their deliverances, which taken together deal with the whole face of the Christian religion today, without feeling sorry for the ignorance of many of its best-known antagonists and the error of those apologists who seem to be dealing with particular issues, limited phases, narrow conceptions, and ignoring the immeasurable power of the ancient gospel of Jesus Christ. Those conferences contained representatives of the highest quality from all the major sections of Christendom except the Roman Catholic Church. And their deliverances ought to be mastered by every theological student in all our seminaries.

May we venture to put the matter briefly and without argument in the following manner:

1. First, there are certain characteristic beliefs and experiences, or attitudes and valuations, which distinguish Christianity from all other religions as well as from the beliefs and experiences of non-Christians in



our western world. These form the *continuum*, the abiding elements, which, amid all variations and controversies within the Christian Church, have formed the very basis and subject matter of those controversies and have kept those variations within that range of outlook upon man and his destiny which we know as Christian.

2. Second, these fundamental elements must be dated back to the historic origin of the gospel of Christ. Criticism has for a hundred years dealt with those fundamental features and has failed to prove that they do not belong to the first generation of Christian believers. There is no generally accepted theory either of the Gospels or Epistles which disproves the essential features of the story. The unique consciousness, character and power of Jesus Christ stands as a historic fact and can only be explained as an act of God Himself, in which His purpose with mankind takes effect upon the lives of men. The change which Jesus Christ wrought upon the consciousness of His disciples, before and after His crucifixion, has become in substance normal for all who are led to accept His authority and to experience the power of God in that acceptance. It is a change which today, amid all differences, defects and deflections, is recognizable as uniting the Christians of all races and cultures in one fundamental spiritual life.

3. At Lausanne in 1927 a declaration as to the substance of the Christian Message to the World was unanimously adopted. At Jerusalem in April, 1928, this declaration was again unanimously approved and was also restated in a few significant paragraphs. Those statements made by men whose names are

among the great scholars and thinkers and exemplars of devotion in our day ought to carry in every school of Christian learning the highest moral authority.

Inevitably those statements find the essence of Christianity in the person of Jesus Christ:

"In this world, bewildered and groping for its way, Jesus Christ has drawn to Himself the attention and admiration of mankind as never before. He stands before men as plainly greater than Western civilization, greater than the Christianity that the world has come to know. . . .

"Our message is Jesus Christ. He is the revelation of what God is and of what man through Him may become. In Him we come face to face with the ultimate reality of the universe; He makes known to us God as our Father, perfect and infinite in love and in righteousness. . . .

"The gospel is the sure source of power for social regeneration. . . .

"Herein lies the Christian motive; it is simple. We cannot live without Christ and we cannot bear to think of men living without Him. We cannot be content to live in a world that is un-Christlike. . . .

4. Some of our extremist friends on both sides, right and left of the Church's life, seem unaware of the immense change which is being wrought by a new combination of science and philosophy. The universe of fact is richer far than that of 1900. We know now that the realm of reality stretches far beyond the reach of our five senses. We know that human freedom deals royally with the facts of nature for ends above nature. We know that the realm of knowledge is being daily extended into the study of events of a mysterious order which were taboo to the majority of scientists of the last generation. Human nature is more rich and vast in its contents and powers than those happy psychologists of a few years ago, who

dogmatized so freely about religious experience and its futility in our mechanized universe, could have imagined.

We know that the spread of humanism (so-called) and the intellectual failure of other religions leave Christianity as the only support of faith in a human destiny which can be worthy of the name of God and worthy of the innate hunger and thirst of the human soul for the highest values. We know that as the events which constitute the physical universe are the materials for natural science, so the events which constitute the ever widening range of the Christian life are also the materials with which any philosophy must reckon which would explain "what God and man is." Any theory of God, or of religion, or of morals, which discards these materials is dead already in its very making, because it is not dealing with ultimate reality. That ultimate reality as Christianity conquers the world will appear ever more clearly as "God-in-Christ-in-man." That is the true and final "Religion of the Spirit."



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